

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Silver Needle Inc

Idaho TechHelp

Silver Needle Turns Golden with Lean

Client Profile:

Silver Needle, Inc., is a full service manufacturer of industrial safety and fire resistant clothing and accessories. The company specializes in personal protective apparel for fire, molten metals, liquified natural gas, mining and fire retardant workwear. Silver Needle employs 35 people at its facility in Kellogg, Idaho.

Situation:

As Silver Needle saw demand for its core product grow, it developed longer lead times than desired. The company turned to Lean manufacturing to deal with production and growth issues but experienced resistance in creating a Lean thinking environment. In order to lead plant initiatives and manage change, key supervisors needed to develop more effective communication and soft skills. The company wanted to create a culture of continuous improvement that would keep momentum in Lean practices moving forward and address cultural change issues in the plant. Supervisors needed ongoing coaching and mentoring in how to manage workplace transition. The company also wanted to improve the 3015 garment production process by developing a flexible work cell to accommodate increased demand from a new vendor. Silver Needle engaged TechHelp, a NIST MEP network affiliate, to train all employees in Lean principles that would improve workplace organization.

Solution:

TechHelp led an improvement project designed to decrease lead times and improve efficiencies on the manufacturing floor. TechHelp provided in depth Lean Enterprise Certificate Program training for key personnel in order to create a core of Lean Technicians and internal Lean Champions. TechHelp provided on-site training and conducted a Kaizen event designed to improve lead times and reduce redundancy within the manufacturing facility. TechHelp provided Lean champion and change agent training along with Value Stream Mapping (VSM). Within these strategies, supervisors were equipped with coaching and influencing skills, and the skills needed to create, present and implement future state maps of product families. TechHelp provided Silver Needle with ongoing coaching and mentoring for the Lean implementation. TechHelp helped Silver Needle develop a VSM of the production process garment family and conducted a work cell Kaizen incorporating standard work in progress and inventory management Kanban system. As a result of TechHelp's assistance, the company has experienced a reduction in lead and cycle times, improved on-time delivery, less rework and scrap, and improved cell efficiency. By upgrading staff skills and running a Lean operation, the company is being considered for a Dupont contract worth nearly \$2 million.

Results:

* Retained sales of \$130,000.

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- * Created a cost savings of \$75,000.
- * Invested \$195,000 in capital improvements.
- * Created 2 jobs.
- * Retained 20 employees.
- * Achieved a more competitive and profitable position.

Testimonial:

"We continue to amaze ourselves at how Silver Needle Inc. has evolved under the guidance of Gary Alvarado and TechHelp. Gary inspires us to embrace change. He champions our efforts to effectively engage employees to elicit the improvements we need to make along our Lean journey. He has become our mentor and our friend."

Rene Gilbert, Human Resources & Marketing Manager